



FANNIE LOU HAMER'S AMERICA

FILM BACKGROUND

&

PRESS KIT

An America ReFramed, WORLD Channel, GBH and PBS Production

With major funding provided by:

W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Black Public Media, Ford Foundation (JustFilms), Jonathan Logan Family Foundation, GBH Voices and Equity Fund, Mississippi Humanities Council (MHC), the Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area (MDNHA) and the Better Angels Society

Distributed by:
Women Make Movies (WMM)



A Joy Elaine Davenport Film

Produced By: Monica Land and The Bitter Southerner

Executive Producers: Christopher Hastings, Monica Land and Selena Lauterer

Narration and Songs By: Fannie Lou Hamer

58 minutes & 32 seconds

Winner - Preserver of Mississippi Culture Award – 2022 (Mississippi Humanities Council)

Winner – Best TV Feature Documentary or Mini-Series – 2022 (International Documentary Association)

Official Selection - Monadnock International Film Festival (MONIFF) - 2022

Official Selection - Association for the Study of African American Life and History Film Festival (ASALH) – 2022

Fellow – Better Angels Society – 2021

Press.

“A powerful film, one that illustrates the challenges and sacrifices so many faced in fighting for the right to vote.”
Sylvia Bugg *Chief Programming Executive & General Manager, PBS*

“Woke up this morning with Fannie Lou Hamer’s America documentary still consuming my mind. Still moved, inspired, and overwhelmed by her voice, her determination and fierce advocacy for Black people, yes, but really, for all of us. Run, don’t walk to hear her story now, on PBS.”

Wilson Cruz, actor, *“My So-Called Life”*

“Watching Fannie Lou Hamer’s America on PBS has changed my life in a way I can’t explain. I ain’t been the same since watching on TPT - Twin Cities PBS. She demanded justice while caring for her family. She lived my life before I did...”

Sheletta Brundidge, *comedian, and producer at WCCO Radio*

“There are few Mississippians who have played a more prominent role at a pivotal point in American history than Fannie Lou Hamer. Her story has been an inspiration to so many people, past and present, working for social justice and human dignity, not only in America but around the world.”

Lloyd Gray *Executive Director, Phil Hardin Foundation*

“This film makes the point that this struggle really has been going on forever.”

Alan Bowling *Associate Professor, The University of Texas at Arlington*

“Monica Land has provided us with the rare opportunity to peek inside the life of one of America’s most important moral leaders.”

Erika Dilday, *Executive Director, American Documentary*

“Fannie Lou Hamer’s America will steep viewers in Black history while providing greater context for and insight into some of today’s biggest challenges.” –

Chris Hastings *Executive Producer & Managing Editor, WORLD Channel*

“A perfect Black History Month watch.”

Jared Alexander *The Griot*

“A humanizing treatment.”

James Bennett II *GBH*

“An expressive look at the life of Fannie Lou Hamer.”

BET

“Listening to it, viewers can hear Hamer's sense of urgency, which still resonates today.”

Rebekah Barber *Facing South*

“The film is offering to a new generation of audiences called upon to take up the mantle of preserving American democracy.”

Baltimore Times

Film Synopsis.

Fannie Lou Hamer's America: An America ReFramed Special is a portrait of civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer and the injustices in America that made her work essential. Working with groups like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Fannie Lou Hamer devoted herself to fighting for voting rights and Black political representation. Her efforts would mobilize thousands of Black people to register to vote. Through public speeches, personal interviews, and powerful songs of the fearless Mississippi sharecropper-turned-human-rights-activist, *Fannie Lou Hamer's America: An America ReFramed Special* explores and celebrates the lesser-known life of one of the Civil Rights Movement's greatest leaders.

Film Narrative.

Fannie Lou Hamer's America is an original documentary film told through the public speeches, personal interviews, and powerful songs of the fearless Mississippi sharecropper-turned-human-rights-activist.

If you've ever heard of Fannie Lou Hamer, odds are you were introduced to her through the heart-wrenching testimony she delivered before the 1964 Democratic National Convention's Credentials Committee. As significant as Hamer's 1964 DNC speech was and is, her testimony is but one moment within the activist's career that spanned nearly 15 years and took place before audiences - in every region of the country.

One of the movement's pre-eminent orators, Hamer used stories from her own life to call America to account for the racism that defined every aspect of her existence—from the turn-of-the-century cotton plantations of the Mississippi Delta where she was reared, to her death in an all-black hospital in 1977.

Up Close and Personal:

Fannie Lou Hamer's America not only features rare artifacts from her activist career, but the documentary also engages Hamer's life story — as she told it —foregrounding such themes as the injustice of growing up black and poor in the Mississippi Delta, white supremacist backlash to black voter registration, police brutality, and access to quality healthcare and affordable nutrition.

Drawing Connections.

The film draws connections between these core themes that compelled Hamer's activist struggle and their clear contemporary resonances.

In an era of the Black Lives Matter Movement, where heightened state surveillance, increasing inequality, and police brutality continues, Hamer's prophetic mission is no less urgent and no less relevant today than it was 50 years ago.

Assembled by a team of critically acclaimed civil rights scholars and historians, and the Hamer family, *Fannie Lou Hamer's America* weaves its story from the fabric of a voice that challenged the country during her lifetime—and well beyond!

Press Contact.

For artwork, interviews with the film team, Fannie Lou Hamer's daughter, rights or more information about the film.

Contact: Fannie Lou Hamer's America
flhamer@gmail.com



SAVE THE DATE!

PBS
2/22/22 • 9P ET, 8P CT, 7P MT & 9P PT

WORLD CHANNEL *(check your local listings)*
2/24/22 • 8P ET, 7P CT, 6P MT AND 10P PT
2/25/22 • 9A ET, 3P ET
2/26/22 • 10P ET
2/27/22 • 2A ET, 9A ET, 5P ET

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Our Story.

The concept for the film, Fannie Lou Hamer's America began in 2005 when her great niece, Monica Land wanted to see a documentary on Hamer featuring members of her family. Land had seen many docs on Hamer, but never with any of her family members talking about her life prior to her activism.

Land began trying to put together a film crew and started with her cousin, film producer, Sulla Hamer (The Usual Suspects, Love Field, The Accused, Unlawful Entry) who was working with TV One at the time. Sulla referred her to producer, Keith Beauchamp, who specialized in films from the civil rights era. Beauchamp was speaking abroad about his film, The Untold Story of Emmett Louis Till, which was also released in 2005.

Beauchamp jumped at the chance to work on a film about Fannie Lou Hamer as it had been his goal to do so. Beauchamp introduced Land to Dr. Davis W. Houck a professor at Florida State University.

Houck, like Beauchamp, was also an Emmett Till historian as well as a Fannie Lou Hamer historian and scholar. Houck was working on a book, To Tell It Like It Is: The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer (2010). Houck was delighted to join the project team and introduced Land to Dr. Maegan Parker Brooks, with whom he was working on the book about Hamer's speeches.

Brooks was also a Fannie Lou Hamer historian and scholar and eventually penned two additional books about Hamer, A Voice That Could Stir An Army: Fannie Lou Hamer and the Rhetoric of the Black Freedom Movement (2014) and America's Freedom Fighting Woman: Fannie Lou Hamer (2020).

Houck, who became the Fannie Lou Hamer Professor of Rhetorical Studies at Florida State University in 2016 also introduced Land to Joy Davenport who was working on a film, M.F.D.P., detailing Hamer's formation of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and filmmaker Pablo Correa.

Finally having an amazing team of Fannie Lou Hamer scholars, the group set out to bring Hamer's story to life using only her voice in the film. Robert "R.J." Fitzpatrick joined our team once we started filming.

Through the research initiated by Brooks and Houck, who had been researching Hamer's life for several years, the team uncovered archival audio and video footage, articles, photographs, and television appearances that had not been seen in more than 40 or 50 years! Houck also came across personal handwritten letters that Hamer wrote to her good friend and confidant, Rose Fishman. Those letters, some used in the film, paint a more vulnerable and personal side of the fearless civil rights activist. Continuing a treasure hunt of sorts, they spent countless hours looking for "lost" materials on Fannie Lou Hamer and then transcribing that material to be used in the film.

To get the film on the desired platform, PBS, Land reached out to activist Heather Booth, who was not only a donor to the film, but she also worked with Fannie Lou Hamer during Freedom Summer in 1964. Through a friend of Booth's, Land was introduced to Selena Lauterer a stations relations agent and CEO of Artemis Independent in 2020. For the next two years, Lauterer used all of her skills, ingenuity and resources to ensure Fannie Lou Hamer's America made it to PBS. Lauterer and Land connected with the incredible and immensely dedicated Chris Hastings, executive producer of America ReFramed at GBH and WORLD Channel, and the rest is history!

If 'Our Story' seems like everything fell right into place, it didn't. It was a long and difficult journey. Among our many challenges was the search for footage of Fannie Lou Hamer that we knew existed, but couldn't find because it had either been destroyed, lost, misfiled or not filed at all. One of the tragedies we discovered was that a lot of video and audio footage from that era is sitting in boxes deteriorating in an attic, basement, or storage room, waiting for some compassionate and willing soul to organize it.

Another issue was determining who actually owned the footage and getting them to allow us to use it. Some did. Others did not.

Our quest to have this film focus on Fannie Lou Hamer's family and life prior to her activism soon went off the rails as we failed to find enough archival footage of her speaking on those subjects. Determined to have her tell her own story in her own words – without the benefit of talking heads or narration - our original concept for the film shifted to highlight the footage we did have.

Another significant obstacle that persisted for well over a decade was funding the film. Archival footage, while invaluable and absolutely vital to preserve our history and tell our stories, is insanely expensive. We learned that many film projects like ours – worthy projects never see the light of day because they simply can't afford the footage fees.

We encountered this issue over and over again. And without the help, the support and the continued direction and encouragement of Jed Oppenheim and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, this film would never have been produced. Jed was a true warrior for us, and he went way above and beyond the call of duty to see this production and our curriculum completed. We can never thank Jed and the Kellogg Foundation enough for the tremendous financial footing they gave us.

We had other amazing, willing, and continued benefactors, namely, the Mississippi Humanities Council (MHC) and the Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area (MDNHA). Thank you Dr. Stuart Rockoff, Carol Anderson, Dr. Rolando Herts and your staffs for their wonderful and gracious support.

And thanks also to our many individual and corporate donors, who from the very beginning, believed in this project and didn't hesitate to support it. And they waited so patiently for years to see the finished product. Thank you!

To Schedule Screenings.

Contact: Women Make Movies
<https://www.wmm.com/fannie-lou-hamers-america-host-a-screening/>



Also contact WMM for educational licenses and DVDs.



Film Team Bios.

Keith Beauchamp (Production & Project Consultant)

An award-winning filmmaker, Keith attended Southern University in Baton Rouge where he studied Criminal Justice with the intention of becoming a Civil Rights Attorney. In the fall of 1997, Keith relocated from Louisiana to New York and quickly found work at Big Baby Films. Two years later, in 1999, he founded Till Freedom Come Productions, a company devoted to socially significant projects that can both teach and entertain. He has devoted the last 22 years to telling the story of Emmett Till.

Keith has been featured on 60 Minutes, ABC World News Tonight 'Person of the Week,' Court TV, MSNBC, Good Morning America, CNN, BBC as well as numerous publications around the world including The New York Times, Washington Post, USA Today, Associated Press and the Chicago Sun Times. He has worked on several cold case civil rights cases for TV One and the History Channel. And he is currently the Executive Producer and Host of Investigation Discovery's crime reality series, The Injustice Files. He and Whoopi Goldberg produced the feature film, Till, which will be released in October 2022.

Maegan Parker Brooks (Senior Researcher and Film Consultant)

Maegan received her PhD from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in Communication Arts, with emphases in Rhetoric and Afro-American Studies. She served as a board member of the National Fannie Lou Hamer Statue and Education Fund Committee and is now an Assistant Professor of Civic Communication and Media at Willamette University.

Maegan has published three books about Fannie Lou Hamer. The first, The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer: To Tell It Like It Is, is an anthology of Hamer's speeches, which she co-edited with Davis W. Houck; A Voice that Could Stir an Army: Fannie Lou Hamer and the Rhetoric of the Black Freedom Movement; and Fannie Lou Hamer: America's Freedom Fighting Woman. Maegan also developed the K-12 curriculum, Find Your Voice, for the film, and authored a children's book, Planting Seeds: The Life and Legacy of Fannie Lou Hamer, and produced the eight-minute animated movie, Fannie Lou Hamer, with BrainPOP, both for the online curriculum.

Pablo Correa (Cinematographer)

Originally from Fort Lauderdale, FL, Dr. Pablo Correa is the Program Director and Assistant Professor of the Digital Media and Communication Program at University of Saint Joseph in West Hartford, Connecticut. Previously, Pablo was a visiting professor in the Civic Communication and Media department at Willamette University in Salem, Oregon. Pablo specializes in digital media and documentary film with a special focus on the interests of minorities, especially Blacks and Hispanics in America. His work highlights racial relations, stories of tension, as well as stories of perseverance and success.

As a graduate student at Florida State University, Pablo received the Bronze Award in the 2015 Fort Lauderdale International Film Festival (college documentary category). His film highlighted the civil rights movement in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida and was screened during the 2017 Southern Margins Film Festival at Clemson University.

Joy Davenport (Director | Editor | Cinematographer | Music Composer)

Joy Elaine Davenport is a director, editor, and composer. She has worked as a freelancer on every aspect of film production for over a decade. Her mission as a documentary filmmaker is to elevate and empower underrepresented voices. *Fannie Lou Hamer's America* is her directorial debut.

Robert "RJ" Fitzpatrick (Cinematographer)

A videographer and photographer from Ruleville, MS, RJ has a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree from Delta State University. He is the founder of Hydro Productions Company LLC, and specializes in photography, documentary filmmaking, feature films and video. Specializing in Digital Media Arts, RJ is active in impacting communities

in the Delta in a positive way by fostering the knowledge of and influence of local Delta activists such as Fannie Lou Hamer.

Davis W. Houck (Senior Researcher | Consultant)

Davis is the Fannie Lou Hamer Professor of Rhetorical Studies in the School of Communication at Florida State University, where he teaches classes in rhetorical theory and criticism. Over the past 10 years his scholarship focused primarily on the African American freedom movement in Mississippi, specifically the case of Emmett Till and the speechmaking and activism of Fannie Lou Hamer. Houck is the author/editor of 12 books, including *The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer: To Tell It Like It Is* (with Maegan Parker Brooks) and *Emmett Till and the Mississippi Press* (with Matthew A. Grindy).

Davis has also worked on several documentary film projects, including Keith Beauchamp's series, *Murder in Black and White*, which featured the unsolved killings of black activists, Reverend George W. Lee and Lamar Smith. Davis also serves as the Series Editor of the *Race, Rhetoric and Media* series with the University Press of Mississippi.

Monica Land (Producer | Executive Producer | Researcher | Licensing and Clearance)

An award-winning journalist, Monica has been writing for local and national media outlets for more than 25 years specializing in investigative and statistical reporting, feature and enterprise articles, general news writing and historical research. As the niece of civil rights icon, Fannie Lou Hamer, Land has written numerous feature articles about Hamer, as well as an essay for the book, *Pieces From The Past: Voices of Heroic Women in Civil Rights* (2011) published by Joan H. Sadoff and Tasora Books. Land has worked on television programs for VH-1 and WGN-TV Chicago, and she has also produced historical segments for *Entertainment Tonight* and *A&E's Biography*.

Selena Lauterer (Executive Producer)

Selena has worked in public media for more than 20 years and is the founder and president of Artemis Independent, a media promotions and production company located in Boone, North Carolina. Her public television credits include Co-Producer of the Emmy and Peabody Award-winning PBS series *A Chef's Life*, consulting producer for Vivian Howard's new primetime PBS show, *Somewhere South* and Executive Producer of *A Craftsman's Legacy*. Selena is Head of Production for *The Bitter Southerner* and her company manages promotion efforts for over a dozen public television favorites each year, including *POV*, *Roadtrip Nation*, *Reel South*, *Pearl Jam 20*, *Tony Bennett Duets II*, and more.

Director's Statement.

Fannie Lou Hamer's voice is undeniable.

I want this film to be a platform for her prophetic voice, for her words and her songs, because it is wrong that we do not remember her. It is wrong that her voice was silenced. As a filmmaker, as a white woman telling a Black woman's history, I have no right to speak for Mrs. Hamer. She is the only one who can tell her story. Not an omniscient narrator, not a talking head expert, just Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer from 626 East Lafayette Street, Ruleville, Mississippi.

So, this film was constructed using speeches, interviews, oral histories, television appearances, and performances that were recorded over the course of her life. The rest was shot in and around Sunflower County, including the place where she is laid to rest next to her husband, Pap, on the first forty acres of their Freedom Farm.

When she speaks about America, she speaks about a broken promise. "The land of the tree and the home of the grave." But she also speaks of hope, of the young generations who will make the promise of democracy real. I hope this film reaches them. I have hope because her message reached me, too. Her words are prophetic because we have continued to ignore them. To those still in thrall to the American dream, her message is an alarm: it's time to wake up.

This is Fannie Lou Hamer's America.

- **Joy Davenport**

Producer's Statement.

Making this film was very important to me.

And there are two specific reasons why. One. We live in a society where if you can throw a ball through a hoop from 22 feet, you're hailed as a hero. The same goes if you're good at guitar riffs, if you can sing, if you can dance. Everyone knows who you are, and you're celebrated for it. But for people like Fannie Lou Hamer – who changed our history and helped change the laws that govern our society - many of them are forgotten and even more are not even recognized. I didn't want that for her. Her life was hard enough without people ever knowing who she was and what she had sacrificed for them and so many others.

Fannie Lou Hamer's America is a testament to her sacrifice. Her pain. Her tears. Her sorrows. She worked so hard so that others could progress. And when she died, she died alone, broken, and broke. For most of her life, she lived in abject poverty. But her concern was never for herself. It was always for others.

Fannie Lou Hamer's America is also close to my heart because I've heard stories about her that no one else has. So, I know about the heartbreak she endured. The disappointments and the betrayals. And with all of that, she still got up in the morning, put one foot in front of the other and marched to the frontlines of the battlefield, so to speak, in her fight for equal rights - human rights - for everyone.

With Fannie Lou Hamer's America, people don't have to wonder what kind of person she was, she tells them herself. They don't have to question what she accomplished or how she did it, in this film, she shows them, and she "tells it like it is". And I am so glad, privileged and honored to be able to assist her in that way.

This is my gift to my aunt. And my way of saying to her, thank you.

- **Monica Land**

Film Team Photos.



Joy Elaine Davenport



Monica Land



Maegan Parker Brooks



Davis W. Houck



Selena Lauterer



Pablo Correa



Robert "RJ" Fitzpatrick

Film Photos.





Film Credits.

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